

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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R 221238Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2942
INFO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 06558

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: SHUM, IR, UK
SUBJECT: FCO ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

REFERENCE: (A) LONDON 4937; (B) STATE 74968;
(C) TEHRAN 2961; (D) TEHRAN 3281

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS OF THE EFFORTS OF THE
BRITISH AMBASSADOR IN TEHRAN TO OPEN UP THE TRIAL OF
THE ELEVEN DISSIDENTS TO FOREIGN OBSERVERS, FCO MINISTER
OF STATE JUDD CONFIDENTIALLY INFORMED CERTAIN MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT THAT THIS WAS AN ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT BUT
THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO PUBLIC SUGGESTION LINKING ACTIONS
BY HMG WITH SUCH VISITS BY FOREIGN OBSERVERS. THE
BRITISH UNDERSTAND THAT THE FOREIGN OBSERVERS CAME AWAY
FROM THE TRIAL WITH THE FEELING THAT THE TRUTH ABOUT
HUMAN RIGHTS IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN FOREIGN CRITICS
SUCH AS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAVE MADE OUT. END
SUMMARY

1. EMBOFF TOOK UP ISSUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN WITH
LUCAS, HEAD OF FCO MIDDLE EAST DEPARTMENT, ON APRIL 21.
EMBOFF REVIEWED DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE IN REFTEL (B), EM-
BASSY TEHRAN'S VIEWS AS CONTAINED IN PARAS 1 THROUGH 4
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OF REFTEL (C), AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS RE TRIALS. EMBOFF
FURTHER NOTED THAT SENIOR OFFICERS OF US EMBASSY IN
TEHRAN HAVE HAD SEVERAL RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH
IRANIANS ON THIS ISSUE.

2. IN REPLY, LUCAS FIRST REVIEWED AT SOME LENGTH
BRITISH AMBASSADOR'S APRIL 6 MEETING WITH BAHADORI.

(THIS MEETING WAS REPORTED IN TEHRAN 2971; IN DISCUSSION WITH LUCAS, EMBOFF MERELY NOTED THAT BRITISH AMBASSADOR IN TEHRAN HAD BEEN EXCHANGING VIEWS WITH SENIOR US EMBOFFS.) FOLLOWING SUCCESS OF BRITISH AMBASSADOR'S EFFORTS TO OPEN UP TRIAL OF ELEVEN DISSIDENTS TO FOREIGN OBSERVERS. FCO MINISTER OF STATE JUDD SENT PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL LETTERS ON APRIL 12 TO THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO HAD EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN (REFTEL A), INFORMING THEM THAT THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR HAD PERSUADED THE IRANIAN TO ADOPT THIS COURSE. JUDD SAID THIS WAS AN ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT BUT WARNED THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ALL CONCERNED THAT THERE BE NO PUBLIC SUGGESTION LINKING ACTIONS BY HMG WITH VISITS OF REPRESENTATIVES OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. THIS WOULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE BECAUSE THE IRANIANS RESENT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

3. LUCAS CONTINUED THAT WROBEL CONCLUDED THAT THE DEFENSE COUNSEL IN THE TRIAL DID ALL THAT COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED, AND THAT WHILE THE PROCEDURES LACKED THE SAFEGUARDS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN LAW, THEY WERE NOT IN THEMSELVES INEQUITABLE. HE TOLD THE BRITISH THAT IT WOULD BE UP TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO DECIDE WHETHER TO PUBLISH HIS REPORT AS AN AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENT.

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4. THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR, COMMENTING ON THE TRIAL, NOTED THAT THE GROUP WAS OLDER THAN PREVIOUS GROUPS OF ALLEGED TERRORISTS. THEY WERE OLDER, AND MOST HAD HELD SENIOR POSITIONS IN ACADEMIC LIFE, GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE BUSINESS. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE GOI HAD BROKEN UP A GROUP OF MEN WHO HAD BECOME COMMUNISTS WHILE STUDYING ABROAD AND HAD BEEN COVERTLY PURSUING COMMUNIST AIMS SINCE THEIR RETURN TO IRAN. THE HEAVY SENTENCES REFLECT THE DAMAGE THEY MAY HAVE DONE. THE FOREIGN OBSERVERS CAME AWAY FROM THE TRIAL WITH THE FEELING THAT A START HAD BEEN MADE IN IMPROVING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN IRAN, AND THAT THE TRUTH ABOUT IT IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN THE FOREIGN CRITICS HAD MADE OUT. WROBEL WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE SUPERFICIALITY AND BIAS OF THE BRIEFING HE HAD BEEN GIVEN BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

5. MEANWHILE, THE BRITISH EMBASSY IS CONTINUING TO SEND IN DETAILED DESPATCHES ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION, WHICH ARE BEING REPEATED TO BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON. THE CONCLUSION OF THE MOST RECENT SUCH DESPATCH IS THAT IN THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN TEHRAN
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DOES NOT ACCEPT THE WORD OF EITHER THE GOI OR ITS CRITICS. WHILE SAVAK WAS BRUTAL, THERE IS NO LONGER SYSTEMATIC TORTURE IN IRAN. BY THIRD WORLD STANDARDS, IRAN IS NOT ALL THAT BAD. IRAN NOW REALIZES THAT IT CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE AN ARROGANT INDIFFERENCE TO FOREIGN OPINION, AND IS TRYING TO PRESENT A BETTER IMAGE ABROAD. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, ITS EMBASSY IN TEHRAN CONCLUDES, SHOULD KEEP ITS PERSPECTIVE, REFRAIN FROM GOING PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE, AND ACT ON THE BASIS THAT INFORMAL DISCUSSION CAN PRODUCE CHANGE.

6. FINALLY, LUCAS COMMENTED, IT IS NOT FOR THE FCO TO WHITEWASH THE IRANIAN REGIME IN THE UK. HE AGREED THAT IT IS UP TO THE IRANIAN EMBASSY IN LONDON TO CONTINUE TO TAKE ACTION TO DEFUSE CRITICISM OF IRAN. MEANWHILE, THE FCO CAN DISCREETLY POINT OUT TO CRITICS OF THE IRANIAN REGIME THAT IT IS NOT AS BAD AS IT IS PAINTED, AND THAT BRITISH EXPORTS TO IRAN ARE SO IMPORTANT TO THE BRITISH ECONOMY THAT THE FCO AND PARLIAMENT MUST BE CAREFUL WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT THE REGIME IN PUBLIC. SPIERS

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